



## *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!*

**NORTH CAROLINA'S PLAN FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS**





This document was produced in compliance with NC General Statute 115C-21 – Powers and duties of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction: “...To report biennially to the Governor 30 days prior to each regular session of the General Assembly, such report to include information and statistics of the public schools, with recommendations for their improvement and for changes in the school law.”

# Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!

## NORTH CAROLINA'S PLAN FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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# a message from...



STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

**Dr. June St. Clair Atkinson**

CHAIRMAN OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

**Dr. William Harrison**

*NC State Board of Education Mission: "Every public school student will graduate from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st Century."*

Each school morning, educators in North Carolina's 2,524 traditional and charter public schools welcome more than 1.4 million students into their classrooms for another day of learning. This small miracle happens every day thanks to the efforts of thousands of people who teach students, support teachers and create the environment and structures that are necessary in order for the school doors to remain open. These people include teachers, of course, but also principals, bus drivers, building maintenance workers, school curriculum experts, secretaries, custodians, teacher assistants, accountants, webmasters, data analysts, technology specialists, school nurses and many other workers. All of these employees are organized in 115 school districts or under the direction of 100 local charter schools and are supported by state, local and federal funding.

These employees provide the tools and support that teachers and students need to focus on learning. And all of this is to reach one goal: to graduate students who are career and college ready.

In this challenging and competitive economic time, high school graduation is a minimum requirement for successful adulthood. Preparing every student for graduation requires addressing the needs of students who don't connect to traditional schooling because they do not see its relevance or because of poverty, language barriers, disabilities and other special needs and challenges. In North Carolina, with more than 53 percent of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch and more than 11 percent of students identified with disabilities, there are many students who may need additional attention in



order to succeed. This requires education leaders to create an environment that:

- helps teachers and principals be the best they can be;
- supports learning with relevant and strong curriculum standards and assessments;
- provides up-to-date technology tools and information; and
- turns around schools that have persistent student achievement problems.

This year, as the North Carolina General Assembly reconvenes to craft the 2011-13 biennial budget, we know that our state faces “a perfect storm” of increased expectations, decreased resources, and students who come to school needing relevance, services and access to 21st Century tools to help them succeed in the classroom and the global marketplace.

In 2010, North Carolina education leaders, under the direction of Governor Bev Perdue, earned one of the 12 Race to the Top grants provided by the US Department of Education. This nearly \$400 million

grant is underwriting the state’s *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* initiative, which guides our work to meet the challenges described here and to create schools that educators and students need today.

This report outlines the *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* plan for North Carolina’s public schools and how it will help us reach our goals for students and for our state. It also highlights efforts and progress already underway in North Carolina.

We are grateful to the many educators, students and families who work together each day on behalf of learning. Their work shapes the future of North Carolina. We are equally grateful for our state’s lawmakers and others who have answered the call to lead with creativity and vision.



JUNE ST. CLAIR ATKINSON, Ed.D.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction



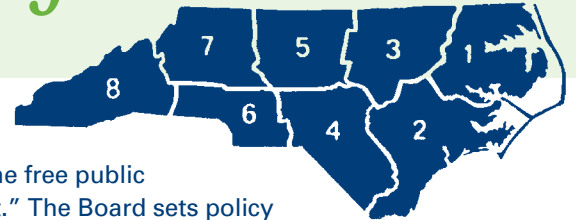
WILLIAM C. HARRISON, Ed.D.

Chairman | State Board of Education



# The State Board of Education

## MEMBER PROFILES



The North Carolina State Board of Education is a group of citizen-leaders who are responsible for “supervising and administering the free public schools system and the educational funds provided for its support.” The Board sets policy that guides the work of the NC Department of Public Instruction, led by State Superintendent June Atkinson. Superintendent Atkinson is serving in her second four-year term as State Superintendent and is the first woman elected by North Carolina voters to serve in that role. Board members include the Lieutenant Governor, the State Treasurer and 11 other members appointed by the Governor to serve eight-year terms. Eight members represent each of the state’s educational districts, and three are at-large appointees.

The Board’s policies – and the Department of Public Instruction’s activities – touch all aspects of public schooling. These include: educator licensing and evaluation; professional development; curriculum and learning standards for students; student assessments and school accountability; technology and data systems; financial and school business services; facilities, transportation, insurance and child nutrition support; and support to low-performing schools and districts.



*William C. Harrison, Ed.D. / Chairman*

**Member-at-Large | Appointed in March 2009 | Term expires on March 31, 2011**

301 N. Wilmington St., 6302 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-6302 | 919.807.3441



*June St. Clair Atkinson, Ed.D.*

**State Superintendent and Secretary to the State Board of Education**

6301 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-6301 | 919.807.3432



*Walter Dalton / Lieutenant Governor*

**Ex Officio Member**

310 N. Blount Street, Raleigh, NC 27699-0401 | 919.733.7358



*Janet Cowell / State Treasurer*

**Ex Officio Member**

Albemarle Building | 325 N. Salisbury Street, Raleigh, NC 27603-1385 | 919.508.5158



*Wayne McDevitt / Vice Chairman*

**8th Education District | Appointed in March 2001 | Term expires on March 31, 2017**

81 Morlin Acres Dr., Marshall, NC 28753-0063 | 828.649.2144



*Jean W. Woolard*

**1st Education District | Appointed in August 2010 | Term expires on March 31, 2011**

6472 NC Highway 32 South, Plymouth, NC 27962



*Reginald Kenan*

**2nd Education District | Appointed in August 2009 | Term expires on March 31, 2017**

PO Box 472 Warsaw, NC 28398 | 910.293.7801



*Kevin D. Howell*

3rd Education District | Appointed in August 2007 | Term expires on March 31, 2015

NC State University External Affairs, Campus Box 7001, Raleigh, NC 27695 | 919.515.9340



*Shirley E. Harris*

4th Education District | Appointed in May 2005 | Term expires on March 31, 2013

229 Fox Den Road, Troy, NC 27371 | 1.800.801.7983



*Chris Greene*

5th Education District | Appointed in June 2009 | Term expires on March 31, 2013

811 Country Club Drive, High Point, NC 27262 | 336.882.3800



*John A. Tate, III*

6th Education District | Appointed in May 2003 | Term expires on March 31, 2015

1431 Biltmore Drive, Charlotte, NC 28207-2556 | 704.374.6451



*Robert Thomas Speed*

7th Education District | Appointed in May 2003 | Term expires on March 31, 2011

P.O. Box 432, Boone, NC 28607-0432 | 828.264.1191





### *Melissa E. Bartlett*

**Member-at-Large | Appointed in May 2005 | Term expires on March 31, 2013**

304 S. Morgan Street, Roxboro, NC 27573



### *Patricia (Tricia) N. Willoughby*

**Member-at-Large | Reappointed to a second term in May 2009 | Term expires March 31, 2017**

20301 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-0301 | 919.715.3535

#### *Teacher-of-the-Year Advisors*

- **Facciolini, Jennifer** – 2010-11 AT&T NC Teacher of the Year, Sampson County Public Schools, 437 Rowan Road, Clinton, NC 28328, (910) 592-1401
- **Garner, Jessica** – 2009-10 AT&T NC Teacher of the Year, Union County Public Schools, 500 N. Main Street, Suite 700, Monroe, NC 28112-4730, (704) 283-3733

#### *Principal Advisor*

- **King, Jan** – 2010 Wachovia NC Principal of the Year, Henderson County Public Schools, 414 4th Avenue West, Hendersonville, NC 28739-4261, (828) 697-4733

#### *Superintendent Advisor*

- **Hoke, Jack** – Alexander County Schools, 700 Liledoun Road, Taylorsville, NC 28681, (828) 632-7001

#### *Local Board of Education Advisor*

- **Tatum, Bill** – Lee County Board of Education, 106 Gordon Street, Sanford, NC 27330, (919) 774-6226

#### *Student Advisors*

- **Del Pizzo, Brittney** – Senior Student Advisor, South View High School (Cumberland County Schools), 4184 Elk Road, Hope Mills, NC 28348-1698, (910) 425-8181
- **DeLoatch, Montrey** – Junior Student Advisor, Orange High School (Orange County Schools), 500 Orange High Road, Hillsborough, NC 27278, (919) 732-6133



# Career & College:

## READY, SET, GO!

Changing a complex system of local schools and school districts is no simple task. Behind these schools and districts are thousands of educators and other school employees, more than 1.4 million students and their families, business leaders and other influential citizens, as well as state, county, city or town governments and elected leaders.

*Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* is designed to mobilize all of these individuals and groups toward the goal of graduating all students from high school prepared for further education and successful employment. This high-level goal encompasses many smaller goals and objectives that will move North Carolina public schools forward. In their successful application for federal Race to the Top funding, state education leaders capitalized on the work that was already underway and received federal funding to help North Carolina move further and faster toward realizing *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* for every school district, every public school and every student. Race to the Top dollars are not a replacement for state funds lost in this very difficult economic environment, but are meant to serve as game-changing funds to help North Carolina build infrastructure and capacity that will strengthen our public schools.

The work to improve public education requires partners from colleges and universities and non-governmental organizations, including, in some

cases, private vendors. Many of these partners were involved in the federal Race to the Top application from its early development through approval by the US Department of Education. Their responsibilities, when available, are noted throughout this report.

Here's North Carolina's plan in four key areas:

- great teachers and principals;
- learning standards and assessments that align with 21st Century demands;
- technology systems to support strong schools; and
- turnaround support for the lowest-achieving schools.

These four areas focus on putting the right people in place, ensuring the proper school environments and learning standards, providing tools appropriate for today's young learners and taking responsibility for schools that have historically low performance. Together, these activities represent the four pillars of the state's Race to the Top work and will help ensure that students are "Ready" for school, "Set" to succeed and prepared to "Go" on to college and careers.

## *Measuring Our Progress:*

*Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* must have a clear finish line with markers along the way. A steady and reasonable rate of improvement must be targeted.



The NC State Board of Education has established the following measures to ensure that it is on the right track, headed in the right direction and working toward ambitious and achievable goals.

The following measures and outcomes have been set through the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, the first two years of *Career & College: Ready, Set Go!*. These overall goals will be extended as the halfway mark (2012) of the four-year initiative (2010-2014) nears.

Goal	Measures	Baseline 2009-10	Target						
			2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
1. Student Achievement	% of students passing or excelling in both math and reading end-of-grade assessments	66.3%	69%	72%	75% <sup>1</sup>	78%	81%	84%	87%
	% of students passing or excelling on end-of-course assessments	80.7%	83%	85%	87% <sup>2</sup>	89%	91%	93%	95%
	NAEP Reading Grade 4	219	–	223	–	229	–	233	–
	NAEP Reading Grade 8	260	–	264	–	270	–	274	–
	NAEP Math Grade 4	244	–	248	–	254	–	258	–
	NAEP Math Grade 8	284	–	288	–	294	–	298	–
2. Graduation Rates	4-Year Cohort Rate <sup>3</sup>	74.2%	76%	79%	82%	85%	87%	88%	89%
3. Career and College Readiness	Average SAT Composite in Reading and Math	1008 (63%)	1009 (65%)	1014 (67%)	1019 (69%)	1025 (72%)	1030 (74%)	1033 (76%)	1035 (78%)
	% of AP exams taken on which students scored 3 or above (% of students taking AP exams) <sup>4</sup>	57.6% (10.4%)	60% (11%)	62% (13%)	64% (15%)	66% (17%)	68% (19%)	70% (21%)	72% (23%)
	% of freshmen enrolled in at least one remedial course	UNC <sup>5</sup>	9%	8%	7%	6%	5%	4%	3%
		Community College	67% <sup>6</sup> (2009)	60%	56%	52%	48%	45%	42%
4. College Enrollment	% of high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary programs	66% (2008)	67% <sup>7</sup>	68%	70%	72%	74%	76%	78%
5. College Degree or Completion Rate	UNC-GA, NCCCS, NCICU Need to determine								

<sup>1</sup> Note that the 2012-13 school year, new assessments aligned to new standards (including the Common Core) will be implemented in NC which may require the adjustment of these targets to ensure ambitiousness and feasibility. <sup>2</sup> See above. <sup>3</sup> Targets have been increased as compared to the NC Race to the Top (RttT) application because new data was released after the submission of the RttT application. <sup>4</sup> Measure modified from RttT application. <sup>5</sup> Measure modified from RttT application. <sup>6</sup> New baseline data became available after the RttT application submission (an increase from 64 to 67). Targets were maintained. <sup>7</sup> 2010-11 Target has been increased compared to the RttT application because new data were released after the submission of the RttT application.

# Reaching Our Goals:

## GREAT TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

Teachers and principals are at the heart of every school. They set the tone for learning, establish expectations and ensure that the school environment is respectful, healthy, engaging and supportive for all students and staff.

All teachers and principals are required to be licensed by the NC Department of Public Instruction according to specific professional and academic standards that are continually re-evaluated and updated.

### ***Performance-Based Teacher & Principal Evaluation***

- Fully implement the new North Carolina teacher and principal evaluation processes statewide, with student achievement growth data used as a significant component in a balanced evaluation system. Implementation by 2011.

### ***Performance-Based Incentives***

- Provide opportunities for teachers and principals to earn incentives based on student performance. Locally-determined timeline.

### ***Student Learning and Teacher & Principal Evaluation***

- Develop, with the involvement of all stakeholders, a state-level, equitable, reliable and transparent system for integrating student achievement growth data into evaluations for all teachers and principals. Implementation completed by August 2014.
- Implement Student Learning Conditions Survey in grades 7, 9 and 11 so that policymakers, teachers, administrators, parents and the community can

be more informed about what keeps students in school. Implemented by July 2011.

### ***Regional Leadership Academies***

- Increase the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas. One Academy has opened; two others are in development for a July 2011 opening date.

### ***Strategic Staffing Initiatives – By August 2014.***

- *Expand teacher recruitment and licensure programs. Implementation by August 2014.*
  - Teach for America – Increase the number of TFA teachers in low-performing schools.
  - NC Teacher Corps – Create North Carolina’s own Teach for America-based program to recruit and prepare North Carolina college graduates to teach in low-performing schools not served by TFA.
  - Induction Support for New Teachers – Provide a comprehensive, three-year induction program for novice teachers in low-achieving schools.
- *Provide effective teachers via virtual and blended courses.*
  - Expand the availability and use of virtual courses in mathematics and science in low-performing schools and other schools in which curriculum offerings are limited and qualified teachers are unavailable locally.

- *Research on effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs.*
  - Data and research by University of North Carolina institutions will be used to improve, expand or end programs in public schools.

***Professional Development – Ongoing through August 2014.***

- Create, train and support a cadre of teacher and principal professional development leaders to establish sustainable professional development capacity statewide.
- Develop resources (workshops, professional learning communities, virtual courses, webinars, etc.) to support effective professional activities and create additional resources as needed.
- Expand the online professional development infrastructure to provide accessible and high-quality online professional development for all educators in North Carolina.
- Evaluate professional development activities to determine the impact on teaching practices and student achievement with an eye toward improving professional development accordingly.

***Teacher Preparation (Activity in conjunction with University of North Carolina General Administration, private and independent colleges and universities and Teach for America) – Producing More and Better Teachers – Ongoing through August 2014.***

- Increase the number of teacher preparation programs for both alternative and traditional licensure options.
- Establish targets for producing more and better teachers, especially in high need subject areas such as mathematics, science, middle grades and special education.

***Teacher and Administrator Preparation Programs***

- Revise higher education teacher and administrator education programs to align with National Common Core Standards

***Elementary Mathematics and Science Initiatives***

- Continue to develop and expand licensure programs to train math and science specialists among elementary teachers.

***Supporting New Teachers***

- Develop support programs for new teachers in their first three years of employment as a way to improve teacher retention.

***Mathematics and Science Teachers***

- Encourage math and science university students to complete licensure for teaching through scholarship programs such as the Burroughs Wellcome Trust Fund Grant to North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and University of North Carolina at Asheville.

***Status Report:***

- As of fall 2010, the NCDPI has provided statewide training for educators in all 115 school districts to prepare them to use the new process for evaluating principals, assistant principals, teachers, superintendents and central office instructional personnel.
- The teacher evaluation process has been fully implemented statewide.
- The North Carolina Online Educator Evaluation System is now available for implementation in all 115 districts.
- Mentor standards are revised and statewide training is currently in progress for 2010-11.



## *Christmas Trees Connect Students to NC's Economy*

First grade teachers at Wilkesboro Elementary School in Wilkes County have turned a seasonal field trip to a Christmas tree farm into a lesson in traditions, economics, business, science, geography and writing.

Two years ago when Wilkesboro Elementary School's first grade teachers met to select field trips for the school year that would offer a variety of learning opportunities for students, they decided to visit a local Christmas tree farm and to get permission from the farmer to attach handwritten tags to some of the trees. The tags asked the tree buyers to write back to the students. "We knew that traditions was one of the concepts we would be teaching during the holiday season and what better tradition is there than the Christmas tree?" Wilkesboro Elementary School First Grade Teacher Kandice Minton said.

Minton said that by visiting a Christmas tree farm, students learn about how Christmas trees are grown, and what farmers must do to ensure that the trees remain healthy until they are harvested. "We talk about why the mountains are a good place to grow Christmas trees and how Christmas trees are an important industry. We also knew tagging the trees with messages from students would be a great way of strengthening students' writing skills while providing a geography lesson."

Minton contacted area Christmas tree farms and spoke with Scott Ballard, co-owner of West End Wreaths, a Christmas tree farm in West Jefferson (Ashe County). Ballard shares the teachers' passion for education and looks for ways to tell the community about his business. "We offer a number of tours of our farm and I particularly enjoy speaking with students," Ballard said. "I enjoy telling folks



about how we grow the trees, what it takes to maintain their health and how we recycle by planting a tree when one is harvested." Ballard added that teaching the community about the importance of the Christmas tree industry gave people a greater appreciation for the business.

According to the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association, North Carolina's Christmas tree industry is ranked 2nd in the nation in the number of trees harvested and the state produces over 19 percent of the real Christmas trees in the United States. Christmas trees grown in North Carolina are shipped to every state as well as the Caribbean Islands, Mexico, Canada, Bermuda, and Japan.

Wilkes County teachers knew that the homegrown trees were shipped all over the country, and that made the idea of tagging the trees so appealing. Students from three, 1st grade classes wrote messages on cards to give the purchaser information about themselves and to ask them to write back so they could find out where the tree spent the holiday.

Minton said that one of the more memorable responses the class received was from a family who lived in Virginia Beach. The family was related to the owners of the farm and had originally planted the tree and came back this year to harvest it. They also shared how long it took to decorate it and how the whole family, including family from Florida and Wales, had come to celebrate the holiday. "The Christmas tree is a wonderful way of demonstrating the connectedness we have as a community and a nation," Minton said.

# Reaching Our Goals:

## LEARNING STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS THAT ALIGN TO 21ST CENTURY DEMANDS

For generations, North Carolina educators have followed a statewide *Standard Course of Study* that outlines what students should learn at each grade and in each subject. In recent times, this course of study has been revised according to a five-year schedule for each subject area. Since 1993, North Carolina schools have used a comprehensive student assessment program for grades three through high school courses. In 1996, the ABCs of Public Education accountability model was implemented and represented a pioneer effort in the nation to create school-based accountability.

North Carolina educators have learned a great deal about curriculum standards, student assessments and school accountability in the past 20 years. This experience puts North Carolina at the cutting edge of a new generation of student assessments. This will help teachers adjust to student learning needs and provide a mechanism for education leaders to recognize and reward or assist schools that have performed exceptionally well or that need additional help.

In 2010, the State Board of Education, UNC General Administration and the NC Community College System approved the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics, which clearly identify the skills and knowledge that all students need to master to be career and college ready. With that, the State Board

of Education also continued work to revise the state's *Standard Course of Study* with new essential standards for every subject and grade, to develop new student assessments and to create a new school accountability model. This is the first time that North Carolina has changed all three elements simultaneously. Race to the Top funds will allow the state to continue the work that began in 2008 to have all three items in place by 2012-13.

### ***Diagnostic Assessments***

- Implement a diagnostic assessment program that allows teachers to adjust instruction and track student progress more easily. This program, which has been piloted in 2010, will expand as resources allow beginning with the lowest-performing 5 percent of elementary schools and capitalizes on the use of handheld technology.

### ***Assessments Aligned with Common Core State Standards***

- Common Assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards will be developed by the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) of which North Carolina is a member state. Common Assessments are to be developed by 2014-15.

### ***Alignment of Standards, Programs and Budgets***

- The State Board of Education is developing a process to work in conjunction with universities, colleges and community colleges to align high school standards and assessments, community college gatekeeper mathematics and English language arts courses and the UNC system transfer requirements in these two key subject areas.

### ***Transition to New Standards and Assessments – Completed by 2012-13***

- All levels of education will work together to transition to the Common Core. This includes:
  - generating stakeholder support and understanding of the transition;
  - ensuring that all schools of education understand the new standards and assessments in order to prepare teachers and administrators;
  - ensuring that all teachers understand the new standards and assessments and have the tools they need to use the new standards and assessments to improve student outcomes; and
  - ensuring that stakeholders understand and use summative assessments effectively and appropriately.

### ***Career and College Readiness Intervention***

- Implement diagnostic assessments for all 8th grade students in reading, writing, mathematics and science to identify students who would benefit from intervention and to keep them on track for college readiness.
- Implement an assessment in reading, writing, mathematics and science for all 11th grade students. These assessments would be

determined in partnership with the North Carolina Community College system, would provide student-level diagnostic information and would be a part of an aligned assessment system that links 8th grade to the high school assessment to college expectations.

- Develop and provide an “academic bridge program” for students scoring below the cut score of these tests to help them accelerate their preparation for college-level work.

### ***Learning Options for Students – Implemented by July 2011.***

- Develop more international schools and learning partnerships with other countries for global awareness – with a focus on second languages.

### ***Learning Laboratory High Schools – Pilots beginning in February 2011.***

- Develop university and high school learning laboratory or demonstration sites for best practices in preparing and graduating all students college and career ready. The initial sites are Caldwell Early College, Cross Creek Early College, Hillside New Tech, and Wayne School of Engineering and are partnered with teacher education programs at Appalachian State University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina Central University and East Carolina University.

### ***College-Level Courses for High School Students***

- Develop more college-level specific career and technical education courses which will be available online to high school students.

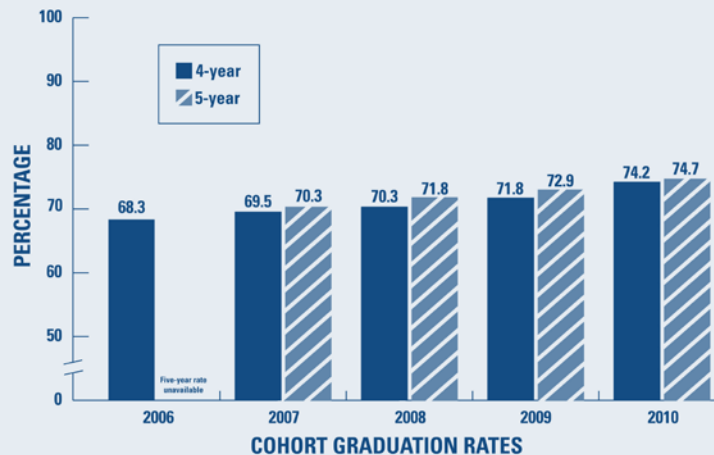
## Status Report:

**Graduation Rates** – Since 2006 when North Carolina first reported a 4-year cohort graduation rate, the rate of students graduating from high school as scheduled has steadily increased.

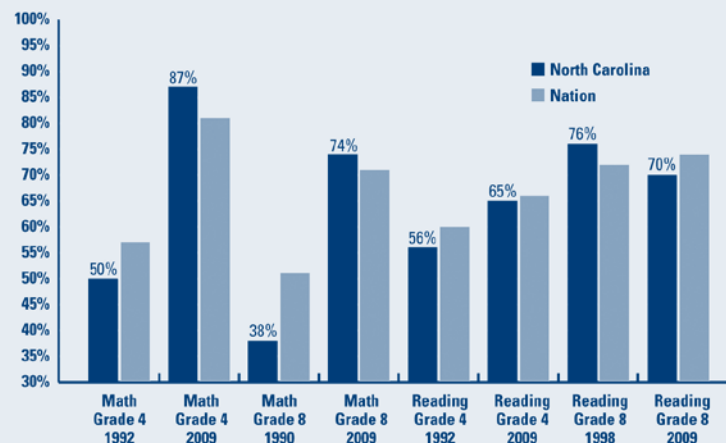
**NAEP Scores** – Today, almost three-quarters to nearly 90 percent of North Carolina's 4th and 8th graders are testing at the "Basic" level or above on national math NAEP (National Assessment of Education Progress) tests, compared to only half or less who were performing at that level in the early 1990s. North Carolina's students were performing below the national average in math in the 1990s and are now performing above the national average. Reading gains for the state's 4th graders are significant. However, 8th graders, once performing in reading at above the national average, are now slightly below the national average. The NAEP is taken by a representative sample of 4th and 8th graders in each state every other year. NAEP reports the percentage of students at three levels: Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The "Basic" level is similar to North Carolina's proficient level on its end-of-grade tests.

**College Readiness** – Indicators show that North Carolina students are preparing for college-level work in higher numbers than ever before and are taking advantage of college-level coursework while in high school.

GRADUATION RATES SHOW STEADY PROGRESS



NC AND NAEP – "THE NATION'S REPORT CARD"  
Percentage of Students At or Above "Basic" Level

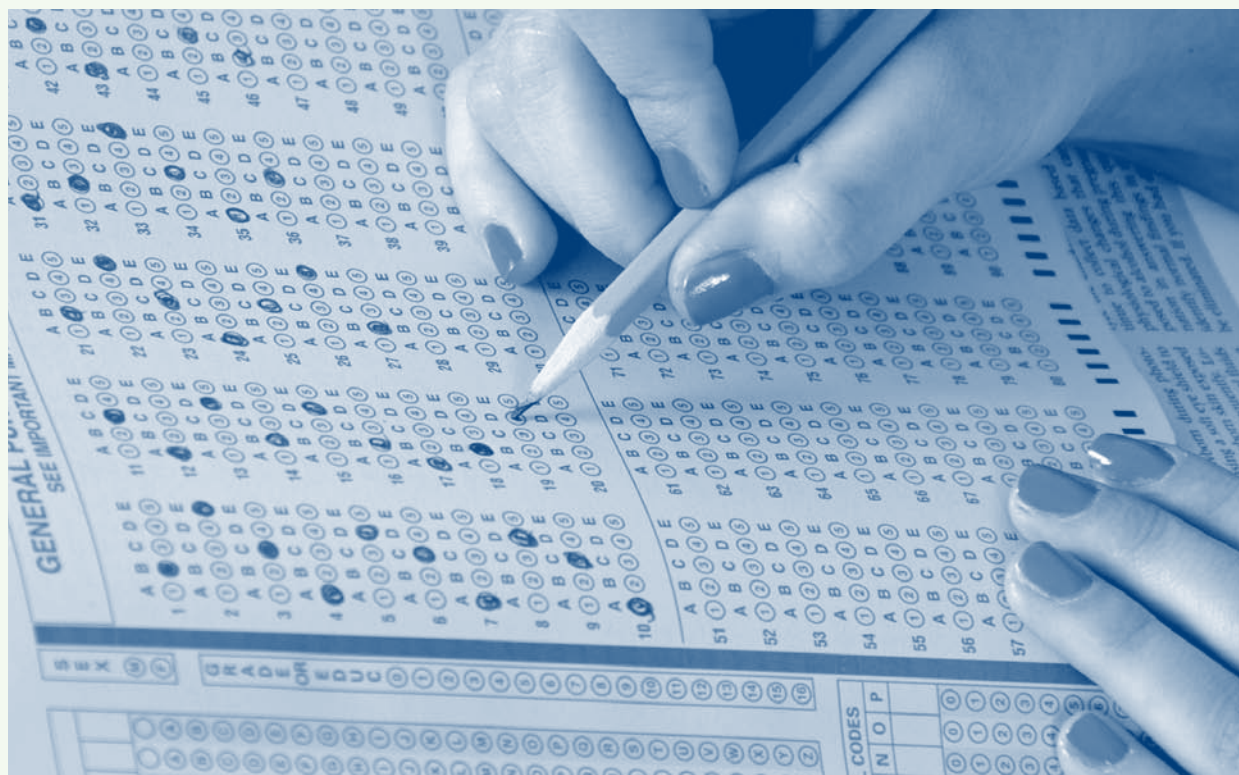


## *Status Report Continued...*

**SAT** – North Carolina students have shown the largest 10-year gain on the SAT among the 22 states and the District of Columbia, where the test is the most commonly used college entrance exam, according to The College Board's 2010 SAT report. North Carolina students improved their combined reading and mathematics scores on the SAT by 20 points over the past decade.

North Carolina's score is nine points behind the national average SAT score. This difference is the smallest between the state and the national average in many years. In 1990, for example, the gap was 53 points and in 1972, the gap was 83 points.

**ACT** – In 2008, the state's average ACT score surpassed the nation's for the first time and has continued to improve since. In five years, North Carolina students have improved their average composite ACT score by 1.4 points. A change of 0.3 points is considered significant by the ACT. While most college-bound students in North Carolina take the SAT for college admissions, ACT participation is increasing. Sixteen percent of North Carolina's 2010 graduates – 14,673 students – took the ACT.





## *New Research Shows More at Four Reduces Achievement Gap*

Since 2002, North Carolina's More at Four academic pre-kindergarten program has enabled nearly 160,000 at-risk four-year-olds to enter the state's public schools better prepared to learn and succeed. During the past nine years, the program also has consistently earned national recognition for its early learning standards, teacher quality and evaluation components from the National Institute for Early Education Research.

The Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill has conducted rigorous, independent evaluations of More at Four since its inception. These annual studies show that children served by More at Four exhibit substantial growth in key areas including language, literacy, math and social skills. Results of the most recent FPG evaluation were presented to the State Board of Education in November 2010 and show that economically-disadvantaged children (those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) in third grade who attended More at Four performed significantly better on end-of-grade reading and math tests than economically-disadvantaged children who did not attend More at Four.

"The results prove that More at Four helps to level the academic playing field among all students," said State Board of Education Chairman Bill Harrison. "Year after year, independent evaluations show that More at Four makes a difference in the lives of tens of thousands of at-risk children. The evidence is clear – this program is an investment that pays off for our students and state."

Findings also show that More at Four plays a role in closing the achievement gap between economically-disadvantaged and middle-class students. Depending on the test and the year, the



study found that the gap between economically-disadvantaged students who attended More at Four and middle-class students who did not attend More at Four closed by between 25 and 40 percent.

The secret of More at Four's success is a strong focus on teacher quality, training, and high quality instruction.

# Reaching Our Goals:

## TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT STRONG SCHOOLS

In today's public schools, just as in businesses and homes, technology is an important tool that allows for improved efficiency, timely communication and increased access to information that helps everyone to make better decisions.

*Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* requires extensive coordination and communication among local school districts, all education sectors and other government agencies. A strong technology infrastructure will help districts and schools to meet the goals of the *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* initiative in a cost-effective way. Federal Race to the Top funds will be used to create a shared services, "cloud" computing environment to provide a way for



### *Status Report:*

NCDPI is leading the execution of the School Connectivity Implementation and Operating Plan, a three-year deployment approved by the State Board of Education in 2007 to connect all local school districts into a statewide network for equitable broadband connectivity to all schools and classrooms. This is fundamental for robust technology use.

- As of May 2009, all 115 school districts are connected to the NC Research and Education Network.
- School districts have received more than \$63 million in federal e-Rate funds.
- A total of \$34 million in technology funding was distributed to North Carolina school in fiscal year 2010 (\$24 million in e-Rate funds and \$10 million from the General Assembly).
- There were 100 On-site Network Consultancy engagements in fiscal year 2010.
- Fifteen districts are participating in the UNC School of Government Certified Education Chief Technology Officer program.

local school districts to access only the software applications they need without being obliged to pay for applications they don't need.

The education system in North Carolina – from prekindergarten through the universities – historically has shared information from each sector to help support good policy decision-making. The system for doing this, however, is not ideal and can be cumbersome. In order to more effectively improve education at all levels and document its impact on the economy, PK-12, community college and university leaders will work together to create a data structure that will include all levels of education and also will coordinate data with the Employment Security Commission, Juvenile Justice and Health and Human Services in a single statewide unified data system. While funding has not yet been procured to complete this work, it remains an important long-term goal for the state.

#### ***Instructional Improvement System – Implemented by August 2014.***

North Carolina is already working to increase the use of instructional data tools in classrooms, but further implementation will include:

- Development of a statewide instructional improvement system to support curriculum-embedded assessments, diagnostic assessments, curriculum monitoring and summative assessments to help teachers plan and make better instructional decisions; and
- Technology infrastructure and teacher preparation to support effective use of the instructional improvement system.

#### ***Evaluation and Policy Analyses – Implementation by August 2014***

- Provide ongoing evaluation of the *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* initiative to make improvements.
- Provide summative analyses to help education and government leaders make future program, policy and funding decisions.
- Conduct analyses of North Carolina policies to identify barriers to progress and to support the development of policies that will spur reform.

#### ***Technology Infrastructure and Resources – Implemented by August 2014.***

- Establish PK-12 education technology “cloud” infrastructure to provide cost-effective and robust networking infrastructure for local school districts.
- Provide digital tools and resources to support all initiatives in *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!*
- Provide professional development to help teachers use the technology resources.



## *NC First in Nation to Offer Microsoft IT Academy in All High Schools*

Any professional who has ever struggled to format page margins in Microsoft Word, edit slides in PowerPoint or work with columns in Excel, knows how critical these computer applications skills are to success in today's workplace. Soon, every student in North Carolina will have the opportunity to use a variety of online tools and courses available through the Microsoft IT Academy Program to learn and refine valuable job skills, build their resumes and make important connections between classroom learning and a future career.

Thanks to a three-year contract between the Department of Public Instruction and Microsoft, students and teachers in more than half of the state's school districts are currently using software and taking courses through the Microsoft IT Academy Program for free. This contract was paid mostly with Microsoft settlement funds provided to North Carolina. In August 2011, North Carolina will become the first state in the country to offer the program in high schools statewide.

State Superintendent June Atkinson noted that the abilities to effectively use Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access are essential in most businesses and offices today. "I am pleased that North Carolina can provide this opportunity for teachers to improve their skills and for students to be career ready," she said.

The Microsoft IT Academy offers users access to the latest Microsoft software, E-Learning courses, and other shared collaboration tools.

Teachers and students also are able to earn certification as Microsoft Office Specialists or Microsoft Certified Professionals by completing course work and passing professional certification examinations.

"The program truly engages students. One of our Academy students recently received all A's on his report card for the first time ever. The most exciting part is how proud he is and the new confidence he shows in himself," said James Ricky Hardy, a Microsoft IT Academy instructor at Leesville Road High School in Raleigh. Leesville piloted the IT Academy in 2010.

The NCDPI also plans to recommend the Microsoft IT Academy courses to replace Computer Applications I, which is currently a part of the CTE Standard Course of Study and the state's largest elective with 50,000 to 60,000 students enrolled annually.





# Reaching Our Goals:

## TURNAROUND SUPPORT FOR LOWEST-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS

North Carolina has more than a decade of experience working with low-performing schools to improve student achievement. Early efforts focused on school assistance teams that were assigned to each school for a year. While this approach offered some benefits and performance improved while the teams were in place, performance often worsened after the teams ended involvement in the schools.

In 2006, the NC Department of Public Instruction began a new method of assisting schools when it was directed to intervene in the state's persistently low-performing high schools. Since that time, this type of consolidated transformation service has been modified and extended. The goal is to develop school capacity to sustain strong student achievement and growth. Under *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* North Carolina is targeting for turnaround the schools that are in the lowest 5 percent based on student achievement; high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent; and local school districts with aggregate performance composites of less than 65 percent. All together, this will entail direct services to 75 schools identified in the lowest 5 percent, nine high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent and 12 districts with aggregate performance composites below 65 percent (178 schools all together). In addition, services are provided to 129 other schools that meet other state standards that initiate some level of intervention.

Schools and districts that have been involved in transformation and turnaround activities over the past four years have shown significant improvements and have built internal capacity to continue the pattern of improvement even after NCDPI staff have ended their on-the-ground commitment with the schools or districts.

Under *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* North Carolina will leverage RttT funds to expand this successful effort.

### ***Intervention in Lowest-Achieving Schools and Local Education Agencies – Ongoing through August 2014.***

- Expand the district and school support system to improve performance of all low-performing schools, with a specific target of moving schools above the 60 percent proficient level.

### ***Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Thematic Schools***

- Develop four coordinated STEM anchor schools each focused on a major area relevant to North Carolina economic development. By August 2011.
- Use anchor schools as centers for professional development, curriculum development, technology use and innovation to impact networks of STEM schools throughout North Carolina. Ongoing through August 2014.



## *Status Report:*

- The data from the Turnaround initiative for high schools show that 75 percent of the 66 participating high schools exceeded a performance composite of 60 percent. Eleven of these 66 high schools that were the lowest-achieving high schools in the state in 2007 are now above the 80 percent proficient level.
- The District and School Transformation initiative has been piloted in five school districts – Bertie, Columbus, Hertford, Lexington and Richmond – with strong results. The percentage of students performing at or above grade level in these districts increased for 85 percent of the schools.
- Of the 75 low-performing schools in 2008-09, only nine were on the low-performing list based on data from the 2009-10 school year.
- Of the original 66 Turnaround high schools, 49 increased their 4-year cohort graduation rate from 2005-06 to 2009-10. The average gain for those schools was 12.7 percent.



## Digital Assessment Puts Data in Teachers' Hands

Delivery truck drivers use them. Doctors use them. Contractors use them. And, now, teachers in selected North Carolina public schools also are using Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) in order to assess young students' learning and keep important data, literally, in the palm of their hand throughout the school day.

In 2009, the State Board of Education and NC Department of Public Instruction piloted the use of PDAs in 27 elementary schools in order to facilitate day-to-day classroom assessment of student learning in specific curriculum objectives and to enable teachers to adjust classroom lessons and activities in response. This pilot program was developed through funding from Reading First, Title II, and Accountability. It is being expanded to 355 schools across 88 districts in 2010-11.

The pilot used vendor software and a combination of devices, some that were already in place in the schools and some that were purchased specifically for this pilot project by the schools. Training for the project was provided in January 2010, and teachers began using the PDAs and software by mid-school year.

For the mathematics pilot, National Board of Professional Teaching Standards-certified teacher Becky Pearce said that she knew after the first assessment where her kindergarten students were in their mathematical understanding of number sense. "Overall, the students' abilities were usually much lower than we expected," she said. "My PDA and the assessment questions provided show that even though a student could count to 100, he or she may not have mastered the skill of counting a group of 18 objects. This opened my eyes and the parents' eyes. We were surprised that some students who appeared to master these math concepts in fact had not."

Pearce was then able to use this immediate feedback to help her adjust her teaching to meet



*Kindergarten teacher Becky Pearce uses a PDA to evaluate the counting skills of a student.*

students' needs. The software's Class Summary Report provides to the teacher each student's task analysis to show exactly where the student is performing and where the rest of the class is also.

Teachers report that they use this information to decide new activities needed for their students, how they might help students further in small groups and in one-on-one instruction.

"By far, the most common use of these reports is to gather information on struggling students," Pearce said. "This system gives me quick turnaround on the results and makes the assessment process easier and faster."

### 2010-11 Participation

#### Mathematics:

- 13 schools in 11 school districts
- 144 teachers and 2,827 K-2nd grade students

#### Reading:

- 482 schools in 88 school districts
- 7,339 teachers and 184,000 students in K-3rd grade, plus about 20 percent of grades 4-5 grade students

# Information Resources

This document gives an executive overview of the work in *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!*. Additional information about the education innovations and improvements supported through this initiative and through the federal Race to the Top funds is available online.



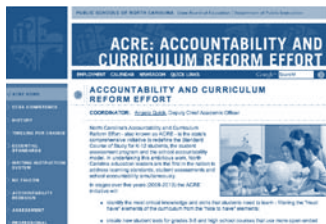
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/rttt>

Detailed information about North Carolina's *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* initiative, funded through a Race to the Top grant. Information includes North Carolina's plan and local school district and charter school plans.



<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/profdev/training/>

Access to the professional development materials explaining the new educator evaluation process included in the *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* initiative.



<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/>

Timelines, background and information about the State Board of Education/Department of Public Instruction's work to develop new curriculum standards, new student assessments and a new school accountability model.

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/>

Links to the new essential curriculum standards developed for full implementation in the 2012-13 school year.

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/redesign/>

Information resource describing the new accountability model under development for schools.



<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/stateboard/about/goals>

Provides the State Board of Education's missions and goals.



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